

Painting Chapter 1



Italian Renaissance

Italy

- International boundary
- National capital
- Railroad
- Road

0 50 100 Kilometers
0 50 100 Miles

Lambert Conformal Conic Projection SP ADMMISN

Serbia and Montenegro have asserted the formation of a joint independence

The Renaissance

We all know what the Renaissance was. Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael and company created some fabulous paintings and sculptures that we continue to marvel over many centuries later and so on and so forth. While these were vitally important artists, and their collective work is what usually comes to mind when one hears the word "Renaissance", as so often happens in life things aren't quite *that* simple.

The **Renaissance** (a word which literally means "born anew") is a name we've given to a period in Western history during which the arts - so important in Classic cultures - were revived. The arts had quite a difficult time remaining important during the Middle Ages, given all of the territorial struggles that were occurring throughout Europe. People living then had enough to do merely figuring out how to stay in the good graces of whomever was ruling them, while the rulers were preoccupied with maintaining or expanding control. With the large exception of the Roman Catholic Church, no one had much time or thought left over to devote toward the luxury of art.

It will come as no surprise, then, to hear that "the Renaissance" had no clear-cut beginning date, started first in those areas which had the highest relative levels of political stability and spread, not like wildfire, but in a series of different phases which occurred between the years c. 1150 and c. 1600.

What were the different phases of the Renaissance?

The Pre- (or "Proto"-) Renaissance began in a northern enclave of present-day Italy sometime around 1150 or so. It didn't, at least initially, represent a wild divergence from any other Medieval art. What made the Proto-Renaissance important was that the area in which it began was stable enough to allow explorations in art to *develop*.

Fifteenth-century Italian Art, often (and not incorrectly) referred to as the "**Early Renaissance**", generally means artistic goings-on in the Republic of Florence between the years 1417 and 1494. (This doesn't mean nothing happened prior to 1417, by the way. The Proto-Renaissance explorations had spread to include artists throughout northern Italy.) Florence was the spot, for a number of factors that the Renaissance period really caught hold and stuck.

Sixteenth-century Italian Art is a category which contains three separate topics. What we now call the "**High Renaissance**" was a relatively brief period which lasted from roughly 1495 to 1527. (This is the little window of time referred to when one speaks of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael.) The "**Late Renaissance**" took place between 1527 and 1600 (again, this is a rough time table) and included the artistic school known as **Mannerism**. Additionally, The Renaissance thrived in **Venice**, an area so unique (and supremely disinterested with Mannerism) that an artistic "school" has been named in its honor.

The Renaissance in Northern Europe struggled to come into being, mostly due to the stranglehold Gothic art maintained for centuries and the fact that this geographical region was slower to gain political stability than was northern Italy. Nonetheless, the Renaissance did occur

here, beginning around the middle of the fourteenth century and lasting until the Baroque movement (c. 1600).

Proto-Renaissance

When studying this period, three important factors should be considered: Where this happened, what people were thinking and how art started to change.

The Pre- or Proto-Renaissance occurred in northern Italy.

Where it happened is crucial. Northern Italy, in the 12th century, enjoyed a relatively stable social and political structure. Mind you, this region wasn't "Italy" back then. It was a collection of adjoining Republics (as was the case with Florence, Venice, Genoa and Siena) and Duchies (Milan and Savoy). Here, unlike anywhere else in Europe, feudalism was either gone or well on the way out. There were also well-defined territorial boundaries that were, for the most part, *not* under constant threat of invasion or attack.

Trade flourished throughout the region and, as you probably know, a thriving economy makes for a more contented populace. Additionally, the various merchant families and Dukes who "ruled" these Republics and Duchies were keen on outdoing each other *and* impressing foreigners with whom they traded.

If this sounds idyllic, please know that it wasn't. During this same period, the Black Death swept through Europe with devastating results. The Church underwent a crisis which saw, at one point, *three* simultaneous Popes excommunicate one another. The thriving economy led to the formation of merchant Guilds that, often cruelly, fought for control.

As far as art history is concerned, though, the time and place lent themselves nicely as an incubator for new artistic explorations. Perhaps Those in Charge didn't care, aesthetically, about art. They may have merely needed it to impress their neighbors and future business partners. Regardless of their motives, they had the money to sponsor art's creation, a situation guaranteed to create *artists*.

People began to change the ways they thought.

The changes took place in *how* people viewed (a) the world and (b) their respective roles in it. Again, the climate of this region, in this time, was such that matters *beyond* basic sustenance could be pondered.

For example, Francis of Assisi (ca. 1180-1226) (later to be Sainted, and not coincidentally from the Umbria region of northern Italy) proposed that religion could be employed on a human and individual basis. This sounds fundamental now but, at the time, represented a very radical shift in thought. Petrarch (1304-1374) was another Italian who espoused a humanistic approach to thought. His writings, along with those of St. Francis and other emerging scholars, crept into the collective consciousness of the "common man." As art is created by thinking persons, these new ways of thinking naturally began to be reflected in works of art.

Slowly, subtly, but importantly, art began to change, too.

We're given a scenario, then, where people had time, money and relative political stability. Combining these factors with shifts in human cognition led to creative changes in art.

The first noticeable differences emerged in sculpture. Human figures, as seen in Church architectural elements, became slightly less stylized and more deeply relieved (though they were still not "in the round"). In both cases, humans in sculpture looked more realistic.

Painting soon followed suit and, almost imperceptibly, began to shake the Medieval style in which compositions followed a rigid format. Yes, most paintings were for religious purposes and yes, painters still included halos around nearly every painted head, but - if one looks closely, it's evident that things were loosening up a bit, composition-wise.

In sum, the Proto-Renaissance:

- Occurred in Northern Italy, over the course of two to three centuries, because of several converging factors.
- Was comprised of a number of small, but vital, artistic changes which represented a gradual break from Medieval art.
- Paved the way for the "Early" Renaissance that took place in 15th century Italy.

Early Italian Renaissance Art

The "Early Renaissance" was all about **Florence**. This was *the* place in which to launch one's artistic career in 15th-century Italy. Several Republics and Duchies in northern Italy were considered artist-friendly. These places were quite serious in competing with one another for the most glorious civic adornment, among other things, which kept a lot of artists happily employed. How, then, did Florence manage to grab center stage? It all had to do with five competitions. Only one of these was specifically about art, but they were all important *to* art.

Competition #1: Dueling Popes

In most of 15th-century Europe, the Roman Catholic Church had the final say on everything. Keeping this in mind, it was of major importance that the end of the 14th-century saw rival Popes. During what is called the "Great Schism of the West", there was a French Pope in Avignon and an Italian Pope in Rome. Each had different political allies.

Having two Popes was intolerable; to a pious Believer, it was akin to being a helpless passenger in a speeding, driverless automobile. A conference was called to resolve matters, but its outcome, in 1409, saw a *third* Pope installed. This situation endured for some years, until one Pope was settled on in 1417. As a bonus, the new Pope got to re-establish the Papacy in Rome. This meant that all of the funding/tithing to the Church was once again flowing into one place, and the Papal bankers were in *Florence*.

Competition #2: Florence vs. the Neighbors

Florence already had a long and prosperous history by the 15th century. It had made fortunes in the wool and banking trades. During the 14th century, however, the Black Death wiped out half of the population and two banks succumbed to bankruptcy...which led to civil unrest and occasional famine, coupled with episodic, new outbreaks of plague.

These calamities certainly shook Florence, and its economy was a bit wobbly for a while. First Milan, then Naples and then Milan (again), tried to "annex" Florence, which was a juicy prize indeed. The Florentines were not about to be dominated by others, though. With no alternative, they repulsed both Milan and Naples' unwelcome advances. As a result, Florence became even more powerful than it had been pre-Plague, and went on to secure Pisa as its port (a geographical item Florence had not previously enjoyed).

Competition #3: Humanist? Or pious Believer?

Humanists had the revolutionary notion that humans, purportedly created in the image of the Judeo-Christian God, had been given the ability for rational thought to some meaningful end. The idea that people could choose autonomy hadn't been expressed in many, many centuries, and posed a bit of a challenge to blind faith in the Church.

The 15th-century saw an unprecedented rise in humanist thought because the humanists began writing prolifically. More importantly, they also had the means (with the newly invented printing press) to distribute their words to an ever-widening audience.

Florence had already established itself as a haven for philosophers and other men of the "arts", so it naturally continued to attract the great thinkers of the day. Florence became a city in which scholars and artists freely exchanged ideas, and art became more vibrant for it.

Competition #4: Let *us* entertain you!

Oh, those clever Medici! They'd begun the family fortune as wool merchants, but soon realized the *real* money was in banking. With deft skill and ambition, they became bankers to most of present-day Europe, amassed staggering wealth, and were known as the pre-eminent family of Florence.

One thing marred their success, though: Florence was a *Republic*. The Medici could not be its kings, or even its governors - not officially, that is. While this may have presented an insurmountable obstacle to some, the Medici were not ones for hand-wringing and indecisiveness.

During the 15th-century, the Medici spent astronomical sums of money on architects and artists, who built and decorated Florence to the total delight of all who lived there. The sky was the limit! Florence even got the first public library since Antiquity. Florentines were beside themselves with love for their benefactors, the Medici. And the Medici? They got to run the show that was Florence. Unofficially, of course.

Perhaps their patronage was self-serving, but the reality is that the Medici almost singlehandedly underwrote the Early Renaissance. Because they were Florentines, and that was where they spent their money, artists flocked to Florence.

Competition #5- the Doors

Florence ushered in the 15th-century with what we'd now refer to as a "juried" competition in sculpture. There was - and is - an enormous cathedral in Florence known as the Duomo, whose construction was begun in 1296 and continued for nearly six centuries. Adjacent to the cathedral was/is a separate structure called the Baptistery, whose purpose, obviously, was for baptisms. In the 14th-century, the Proto-Renaissance artist Andrea Pisano executed a pair of immense bronze doors for the east side of the Baptistery. These were modern wonders at the time, and became quite famous.

So successful were Pisano's original bronze doors, the Florentines decided it would be a great thing entirely to add another pair to the Baptistery. To that end, they created a competition for sculptors (of any medium) and painters. Any talented soul was welcome to try his hand at the assigned subject (a scene depicting the sacrifice of Isaac), and many did.

In the end, though, it came down to a competition of two: Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. Both had similar styles and skills, but the judges chose Ghiberti. Ghiberti got the commission, Florence got more impressive bronze doors and Brunelleschi turned his formidable talents to architecture. It was truly one of those "win-win-win" situations, a great new development in art, and another feather in Florence's metaphoric cap.

Here, then, were five competitions that thrust Florence to the forefront of the "cultured" world, which subsequently launched the Renaissance to the point of no return. Looking at each in turn, the five impacted Renaissance art in the following ways:

1. The Church, stabilized and unified once again under one Pope, provided artists and architects with a seemingly endless supply of subject material. Cities and towns always needed new or improved churches, and churches were always on the lookout for better works of art with which to adorn themselves. Important persons were forever passing on, and they required the appropriate Final Resting Places (elaborate tombs). Florence coveted the finest of these churches and tombs, so it was a great time to be an artist in Florence.

2. Florence, having proven itself at least equal to its neighbors, was not content to rest upon its laurels. No, Florence was determined to out-do everyone. This meant building, decorating and embellishing what was already there, which meant plenty of gainful employment, which meant it was a great time to be an artist in Florence.

3. Humanism, which found a welcoming home in Florence, gave some major gifts to the arts. First, **nudes** were once again acceptable subject matter. Secondly, portraits no longer had to be of saints or other Biblical figures. **Portraits**, beginning in the Early Renaissance, could be painted of **actual people**. Finally, the **landscape**, too, crept into fashion - again, due to the fact that humanist thought was more broad than strictly religious thought. Between the new

intellectual crowd and the ideas they introduced to the artistic community, it was a great time to be an artist in Florence.

4. The Medici, who literally could not spend all of their money, funded all sorts of artists' academies and workshops. The better artists that came (and taught) attracted even more talent, until you could hardly swing a cat, as they say, without whacking an artist. And, since the Medici were keen on glorifying Florence, artists were kept busy, paid, fed *and* appreciated (ask any artist what a happy situation this is!). If one could maneuver oneself into being sponsored by the Medici, which in all honesty wasn't a difficult task, it was a great time to be an artist in Florence.

5. Finally, the "door" contest made it possible, for the first time, for artists to enjoy **fame**. That is, the heady, dizzying *personal* sort of fame we usually reserve for actors or sports figures in the present day. Artists went from being glorified craftsmen to celebrities. All in all, it was a great time to be an artist in Florence!

Small wonder that Florence launched the careers of Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Donatello, Masaccio, della Francesca, and Fra Angelico (to name but a few) in the first half of the 15th-century.

The second half of the century produced even bigger names. Alberti, Verrocchio, Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, Signorelli and Mantegna were all of the Florentine school and found lasting fame in the Early Renaissance. Their students, and students' students, found the greatest Renaissance fame of all.

The High Renaissance in Italy

It would be natural to assume that the next phase in Western art history would occur in the same location. Well, no, this didn't happen.

Wonderful Florence met the end of its Renaissance heyday in the 1490s for several reasons. First, Lorenzo de Medici - arguably the greatest of the Medici - died in 1492. This brought a close to what is often referred to as the "Laurentian Age" in Florence.

Of equal importance, a rabidly religious monk named Savonarola was busy in Florence decrying the decadence of its art which, in his opinion, had caused moral decay and would, quite possibly, bring the Apocalypse upon the Florentines. As is always the sad case in instances such as these, many were willing to listen to Savonarola. The powerful Medici were expelled, fleeing to Rome. Savonarola inspired, for a time, great religious fervor in the townspeople, to the point of organizing the first "bonfire of the vanities", wherein "sacrilegious" items were burned in public. Loyalty being fickle, Savonarola himself suffered a similar fate in 1498. The damage to Florence's profile in the arts, however, had already been irreparably done.

Finally, the Florentine scene had made it incredibly chic for Those in Power (elsewhere) to acquire their own, personal artistic geniuses. On a grand scale, at this time, many were keen to "keep up with" the Medici. The ranks of the Florentine artists were plundered, lured to other locations by promises of wealth and fame.

The good news is that, even though Florence was left with not much talent, it had *already trained* the talent that went elsewhere. In one of those ironic twists of fate, nearly all of the "greats" of the High Renaissance were either trained in or influenced by the Florentine School.

Why is it called the "High" Renaissance?

Simply put, this period represented a **culmination**. The tentative artistic explorations of the Proto-Renaissance, which caught hold and flowered during the Early Renaissance, burst into full bloom during the High Renaissance. Artists no longer pondered the art of antiquity. They now had the tools, technology, training and *confidence* to go their own way, secure in the knowledge that what they were doing was as good - or better - than anything that had been done before.

Additionally, the High Renaissance represented a **convergence** of talent - an almost obscene *wealth* of talent - concentrated in the same area during the same small window of time.

How long did the High Renaissance last?

Not long at all, in the grand scheme of things. Leonardo began producing his important works in the 1480's, so most art historians agree that the 1480's were the start of the High Renaissance. Raphael died in 1520. One could argue that either Raphael's death or the Sack of Rome, in 1527, marked the end of the High Renaissance. No matter how it's figured, though, the High Renaissance was of no more than forty years' duration.

Where did the High Renaissance occur?

A little bit in Milan (per early Leonardo), a little bit in Florence (per early Michelangelo), smaller bits scattered here and there throughout northern and central Italy and a whole lot in Rome.

An attractive feature Rome offered artists, at this time, was a series of ambitious Popes. Each of these Popes, in turn, outspent the previous Pope on elaborate works of art. In fact, if this string of Holy Fathers agreed on any one secular policy, it was that Rome needed better art. By the end of the 15th-century, Popes were coming from the sorts of wealthy, powerful families that were accustomed to underwriting public art and employing their own private artists. Now, a Pope had a great deal of clout. If one was an artist, and the Pope "requested" one's presence in Rome, one certainly packed off to Rome. (Not to mention the fact that these Holy "requests" were often delivered by armed emissaries.)

In any case, we've already seen it demonstrated that artists tend to go where arts funding is found. Between Papal requests and the money being in Rome, the Big Three Names of the High Renaissance each found themselves in Rome being creative, at certain points.

The "Big Three Names"

They were: **Leonardo da Vinci**, **Michelangelo Buonarroti** and **Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio)**. These are the very first artists that come to mind when ever the term "Renaissance" is uttered. Towering geniuses of staggering talent, these three.

But, before we go any further, keep three things in mind. First, while the Big Three deserve every bit of lasting fame they enjoy, they were not the only artistic geniuses of the Renaissance. There were many dozens, if not hundreds, of "Renaissance" artists.

Secondly, during this period, the "Renaissance" was happening all over Europe. Venice, in particular, was busy with its own artistic geniuses.

Finally, the "Renaissance", was a long, drawn-out process. It happened over centuries, not twenty-five to forty years. If little else from this sticks, please remember this point.

That said (and it *had* to be said), let's return to the Big Three.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519):

- Trained in Florence.
- Is best known as a painter, but did absolutely everything else as well.
- Studied human anatomy, via dissection (completely illegal, unless one was a physician), and used the knowledge of such to glorify man.
- Believed only in that which he could observe.
- Had a Duke (of Milan) as his first patron.
- Painted beautiful women, most of whom seemed to be enjoying delicious secrets.
- Disliked Michelangelo, but was somewhat of a mentor (albeit unseen) to Raphael.
- Worked in Rome from 1513 to 1516.
- Was commissioned by Pope Leo X.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564):

- Trained in Florence.
- Is best known as a painter and sculptor, but worked in architecture and wrote poetry as well.

- Studied human anatomy, via dissection (completely illegal, unless one was a physician), and used the knowledge of such to glorify God.
- Believed deeply and devoutly in God.
- Had a Medici (Lorenzo) as his first patron.
- Painted women who looked a lot like men.
- *Intensely* disliked Leonardo, but was somewhat of a reluctant mentor to Raphael.
- Worked in Rome 1496-1501, 1505, 1508-1516 and from 1534 until his death in 1564.
- Was commissioned by Popes Julius II, Leo X, Clement VII, Paul III Farnese, Clement VIII and Pius III.

Raphael (1483-1520):

- Trained in Umbria, but studied in Florence (where he picked up his draftsmanship and compositional skills by studying Leonardo and Michelangelo's works).
- Is best known as a painter, but worked in architecture as well.
- Studied human anatomy only to the extent that his figures were proportionately correct.
- Believed in God, but didn't alienate the Humanists or Neo-Platonists.
- Had, as his first patrons, those who actually wanted either Leonardo or Michelangelo (whose time, respectively, was being monopolized by *their* patrons), but settled for Raphael.
- Painted beautiful, gentle, calm women in a courteous manner.
- Idolized Leonardo and managed to get along with Michelangelo (no mean feat, that).
- Worked in Rome from 1508 until his death in 1520.
- Was commissioned by Popes Julius II and Leo X.

Renaissance perspective - An explanation of perspective drawing.

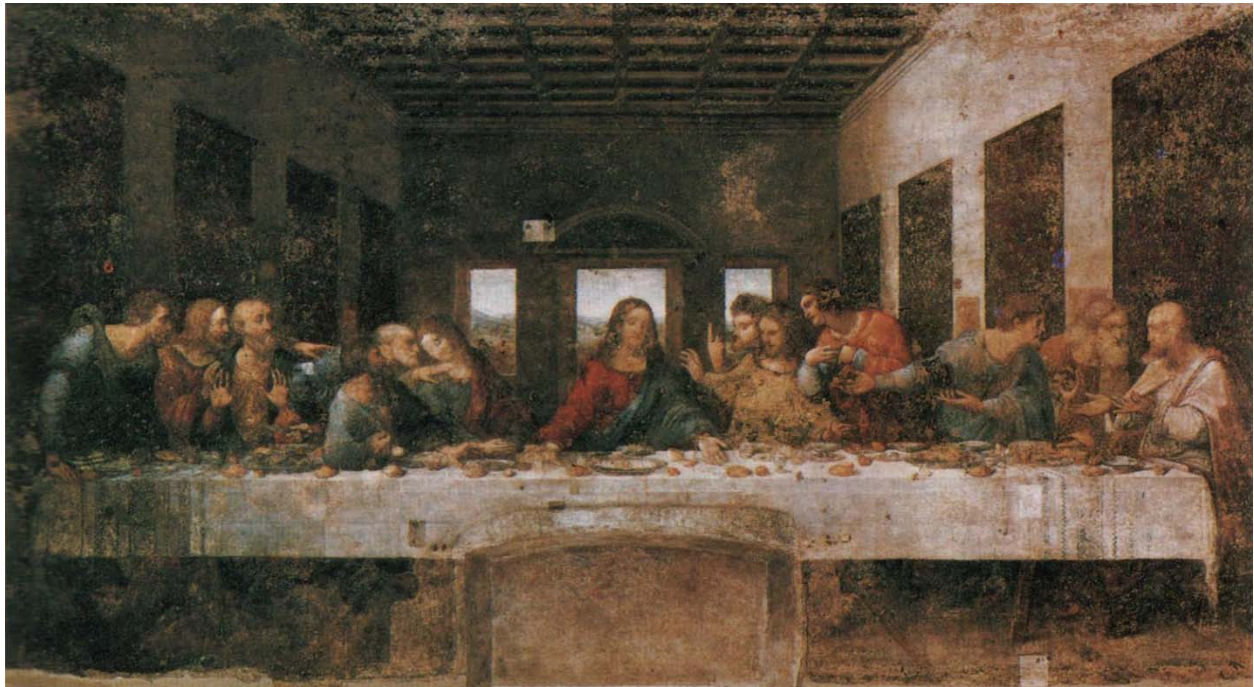
The early development of perspective

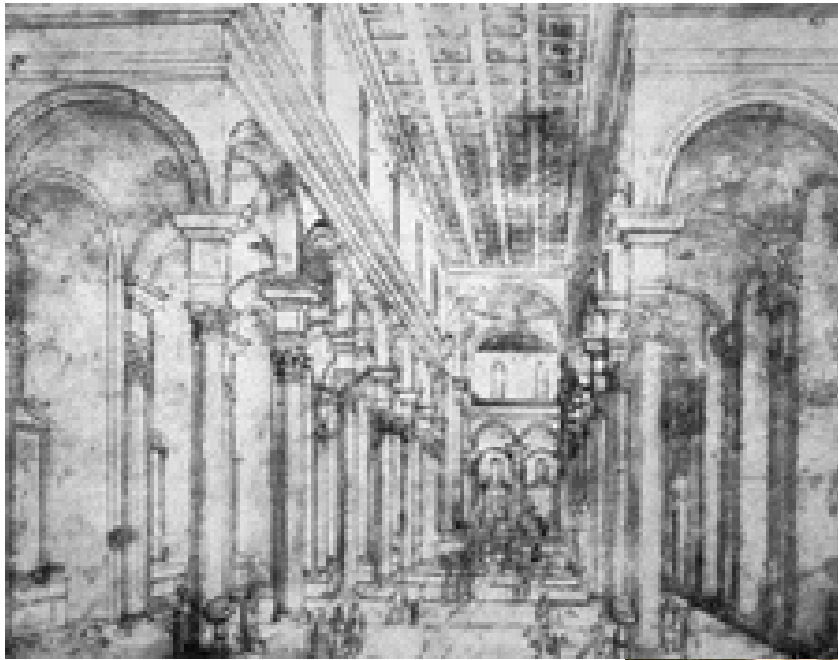
Prior to the Renaissance artists were less concerned with the illusion of reality and more concerned with the content and symbolism of their work. The size of each element in the image related much more to its importance, rather than its placement in a space.

Notice how large the Madonna and child are compared to the rest of the image.

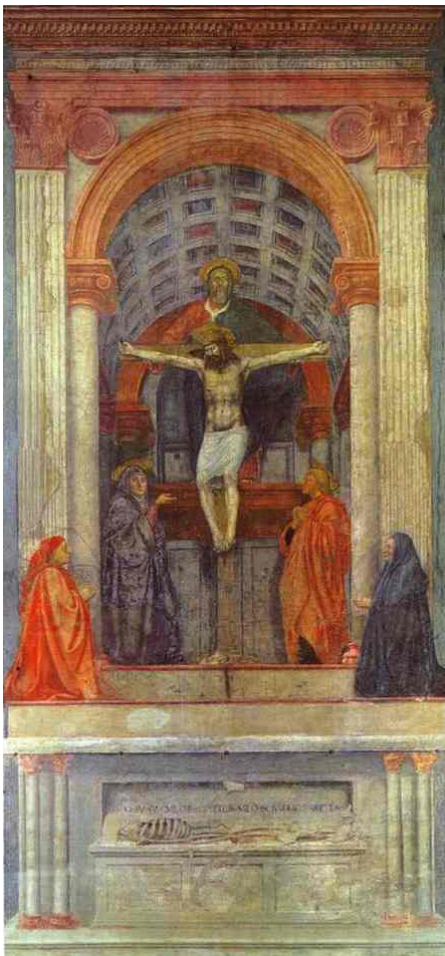
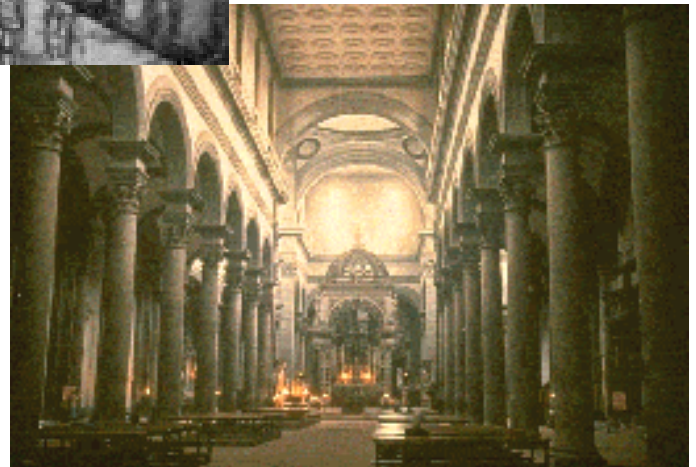


By the height of the Renaissance, artists had mastered the mathematics and visual techniques of perspective. Artists such as Brunelleschi, Leonardo DaVinci and Piero della Francesca were using it to great effect, giving their work a stronger illusion depth.



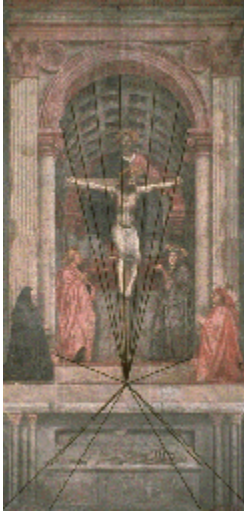


Brunelleschi devised the method of perspective for architectural purposes -- he is said by Manetti to have made a ground plan for the Church of Santo Spirito on the basis of which he produced a perspective drawing to show his clients how it would look after it was built. We can compare this drawing with a modern photo of the actual church.

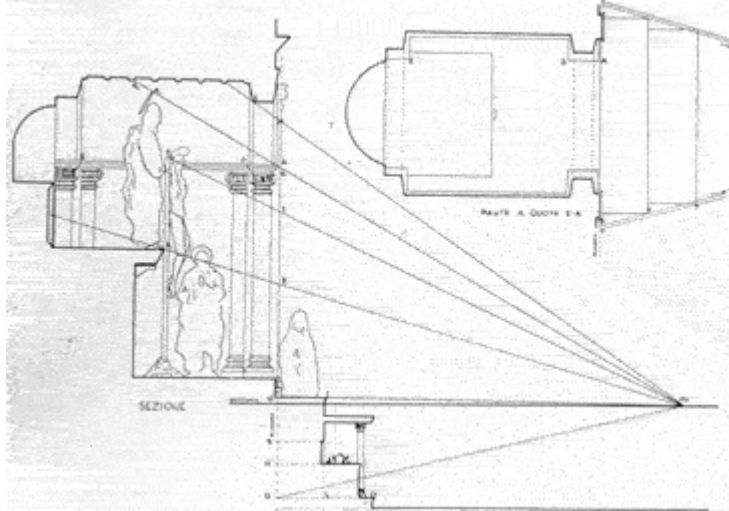


Ten years later, Masaccio applied the new method of mathematical perspective even more spectacularly:

1. In this fresco of the "Holy Trinity", where the barrel vaulted ceiling is incredible in its complex, mathematical use of perspective.
2. Lines following Masaccio's actual geometric framework are overlaid to make clear the structure of the perspective itself.
3. From the geometry it is actually possible to work backwards to reconstruct the full volume in measured accuracy of the 3-dimensional space Masaccio depicts



2.



3.

The rules of perspective

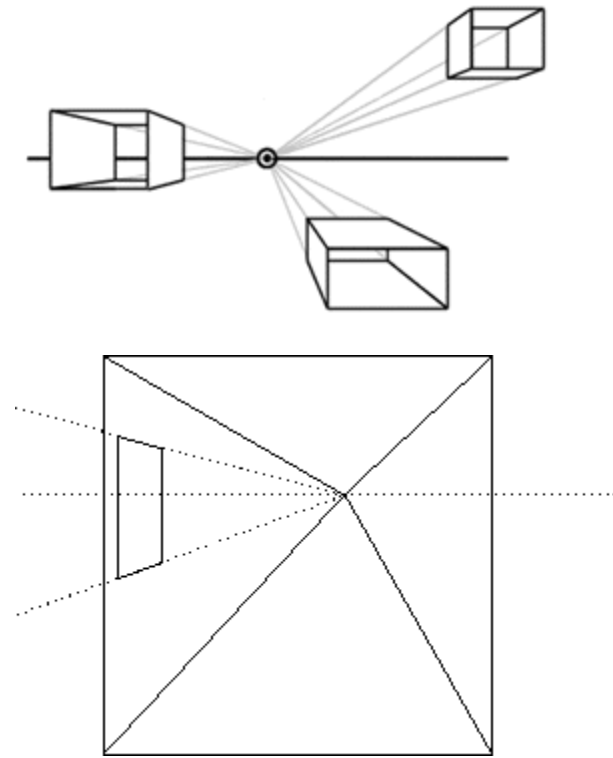
One point perspective

The simplest form of perspective is one point perspective. It presumes a single Point, which all others move towards. It is like looking down a straight road as far as you can see; lines which we know are parallel seem to converge on a single point known as the Vanishing Point. We can see this in the picture of the Agora in Athens. (Below)



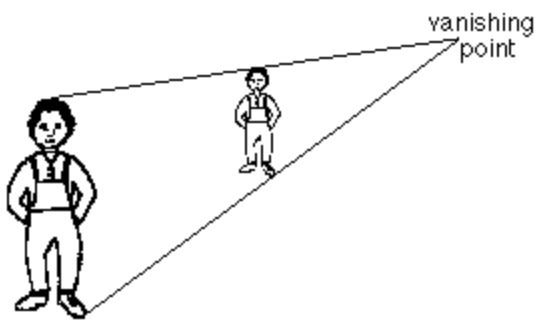
View of the Agora

To draw in one point perspective, draw a horizon line and draw a vanishing point anywhere on the horizon. Lines which are parallel in real life are drawn to intersect at the vanishing point.



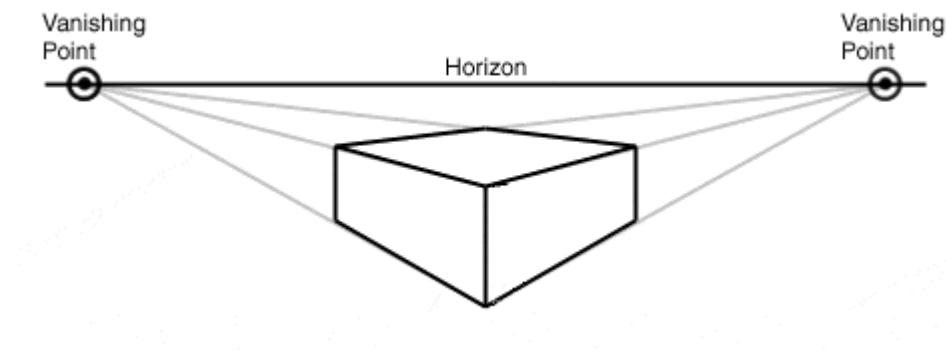
All lines travel to the vanishing point in both these drawings.

Distant figures appear smaller but have the same shape and proportions as they would close up.

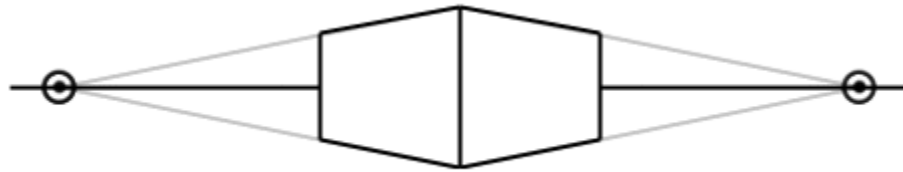


Two point perspective

This is all very fine if you are looking at a thing face on down a corridor, but what if you are facing the edge of something? This is where 2 point perspective comes in.



We are now looking at an object from slightly above and we can see more of the object in question, giving an even stronger sense of its 3-dimensional form.



By lowering or Horizon Line, we can alter our view of the object to make it seem to loom over our viewers. It is important to remember that the horizon line is always at the level of your eyes, regardless of whether you are looking from above or below an object.

Piranesi used this technique to great effect in his drawing "Fantasy on a Magnificent Triumphal Arch"-1765.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Fantasy on a Magnificent Triumphal Arch, 1765

Italian Renaissance questions

1. What does the word Renaissance mean?
2. What were the different phases of the Renaissance?
3. Where did the Proto-Renaissance occur? Why there?
4. How did people change how they saw the world in the Proto-Renaissance?
5. How did art change in this same time period?
6. Where did the early Renaissance occur?
7. Why there? What were the 5 competitions that led to this place being the center?
8. What person led to the end of the Renaissance in Florence? How did he do that?
9. Where did the High Renaissance occur?
10. Why there?
11. Who were the big three names in High Renaissance art?
12. What was their relationship to each other?
13. What was *the* artistic innovation of the Renaissance?
14. Who were some of the artists that first employed this new technique?
15. How does this technique work?
16. How is 1-point different than 2-point?